

Message Text

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44

ACTION NEA-12

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ISO-00 NEAE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07

H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01

SPC-03 SS-20 USIA-15 SAJ-01 OMB-01 ACDA-19 DRC-01

IO-14 NIC-01 /149 W

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P R 061520Z MAR 74

FM USINT DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 160

INFO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

USINT CAIRO

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 0198

BEIRUT POUCH BAGHDAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SY, IZ, UR

SUBJECT: HIGH-LEVEL IRAQI VISIT TO DAMASCUS

REF: TEL AVIV 0970

1. SIR DAVID ROBERTS, THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR TO DAMASCUS, ASKED ME TO CALL TODAY (MARCH 6) TO INFORM ME THAT HE HAD JUST LEARNED FROM THE TUNISIAN AMBASSADOR OF THE ARRIVAL IN DAMASCUS ON THE SAME DAY OF AN IRAQI DELEGATION HEADED BY ISSAL AL-DOURI, IRAQI CABINET MINISTER AND MORE IMPORTANTLY A MEMBER OF THE IRAQI BAATH PAN ARAB COMMITTEE. THE TUNISIAN AMBASSADOR DID NOT KNOW THE REASON FOR THE ARRIVAL OF THE TEAM AT THIS TIME BUT THOUGHT IT MIGHT BE RELATED TO A RECENT IRAQI DECISION MADE ON FEBRUARY 23 TO PROVIDE SYRIA WITH APPROXIMATELY \$50 MILLION IN EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE. THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR, HOWEVER, THOUGHT THERE MIGHT

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BE MORE TO IT THAN SIMPLY A DISCUSSION ON PROPER USE

IF IRAQI FUNDS. HE NOTED THE ARRIVAL OF GROMYKO IN DAMASCUS ON MARCH 5 AND ALSO RECALLED THE IRAQI STRONG-MAN SADDAM HUSAYN VISITED MOSCOW A FEW WEEKS AGO. SIR DAVID WONDERED IF THE SOVIETS MIGHT NOT BE UP TO SOMETHING, POINTING OUT THAT HE HAS HEARD THE SOVIETS ARE NOT HAPPY WITH THEIR BYSTANDER ROLE IN THE CURRENT DISENGAGEMENT DISCUSSIONS. HE WONDERED IF THE SOVIETS MIGHT NOW BE SEEKING A WAY TO (A) INJECT THEMSELVES INTO THE CURRENT PROCESS OR (B) SPOIL THE PROCESS ITSELF BY BRINGING ABOUT AN IRAQI/SYRIAN RAPPROACHMENT WHICH WOULD STRENGTHEN THE SYRIAN HARDLINERS AT THE EXPENSE OF ASAD. THE AMBASSADOR REITERATED HE WAS ONLY SPECULATING BUT THOUGHT WE BOTH SHOULD REPORT THIS DEVELOPMENT TO OUR RESPECTIVE CAPITALS.

2. COMMENT: I CANNOT COMMENT ON POSSIBLE SOVIET INTRIGUES OR MACHINATIONS FROM MY LIMITED VANTAGE POINT. I DO THINK, HOWEVER, IT IS UNLIKELY ASAD WOULD BE DIVERTED AT THIS POINT IN TIME FROM THE COURSE HE HAS SET IN HIS TALKS WITH THE SECRETARY. THERE ARE RUMORS, AS THERE HAVE BEEN SINCE MY ARRIVAL, OF GROWING PRESSURES ON ASAD FROM EXTREMIST ELEMENTS BUT I THINK HE IS STILL IN CONTROL OF THE SITUATION DESPITE ISRAELI REPORTS TO THE CONTRAY (TEL AVIV 0970).
SCOTES

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